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TAGS: PREL PGOV CH VZ CU NS  
SUBJECT: SURINAME: STUDENTS QUIT VENEZUELAN AND CHINESE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS, BUT CUBAN PROGRAMS STILL POPULAR

**¶11. (SBU)** Summary. Recent Venezuelan and Chinese government scholarship programs for Surinamese students have fallen short of their targets. This academic year, eight of eleven Surinamers with Venezuelan scholarships quit their programs, while two of five Surinamers with Chinese scholarships quit their programs. In contrast with the Venezuelans and the Chinese, the Cuban government's scholarship program continues to go strong with 60 participants, according to media reports. End Summary.

**¶12. (U)** On March 16, De Ware Tijd (the newspaper of record) broke the story that eight of eleven Surinamese students studying medicine in Venezuela had quit their programs. The media quoted Suriname's Ambassador to Venezuela, Samuel Pawironadi, as stating that the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had directly advertised these scholarships in the Surinamese press without coordination with Suriname's Ministry of Education. The Surinamese Embassy in Venezuela worked closely with the Venezuelan government once the problems came to light in order to ensure the remaining three students would have an enjoyable stay, the media reported.

**¶13. (SBU)** In December 2008, Post's EducationUSA advisor counseled two of the returning students. One student told her the Venezuelan program was disorganized. Although the advertisement said it was a medical school scholarship, when the students arrived in Venezuela the medical school had not yet been built. Instead, the students were sent to learn Spanish in a village on the Venezuelan-Guyanese border. The student reported that the room and board provided was substandard, and that he became ill before returning to Suriname. Later, the EducationUSA advisor learned this student received a scholarship to finish his studies in the Netherlands.

**¶14. (U)** The March 16 news report came on the heels of a January 22 De Ware Tijd article, which had reported that two Surinamers who had received scholarships to study in Beijing had also quit their programs and returned to Suriname. Originally, there were five students sent to China last fall, according to a public statement by Chinese Ambassador to Suriname Su Ge on China's National Day. These scholarships had been coordinated by Suriname's Ministry of Education. Post's EducationUSA advisor spoke with Richel Najatirta at the Ministry of Education, who is in charge of scholarship programs. Najatirta advised that this scholarship program involved cost-sharing with the Chinese government covering room, board, and tuition for the students while the Surinamese government covered the roundtrip airfare. Najatirta confirmed that the Ministry is currently in dispute with the two students because they returned to Suriname without notifying the Ministry. The Ministry is requesting the students reimburse the Ministry the airfare costs.

15. (U) In contrast with the Venezuelans and the Chinese, the Cuban government's scholarship program appeared to be going strong this academic year. On December 8, 2008, the De Ware Tijd reported that sixty Surinamese students were studying in Cuba.

16. (SBU) Comment. Post's EducationUSA advisor has noted that many of the students who come to the U.S. Embassy for academic counseling are looking for scholarship opportunities. With the comparatively high cost of studying in the United States, combined with scholarship programs offered by other countries' governments, it is hard to attract Surinamese students to the United States at the undergraduate level, especially when the United States rarely offers to pay. Post is researching imaginative methods to attract Surinamese students, including access to Fulbright and Humphrey scholarship programs, but still is unlikely to be able to fully compete with the apparently deep pockets of the Venezuelans, Chinese, or the Cubans. End Comment.

SCHREIBER HUGHES